



ANTHONY J. STASKUNAS

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 15TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Assembly Bill 366 - "Violence-Free School Zone Act"

Mr. Chairman and members of the Assembly Committee on Education,

I would like to thank you today for scheduling a hearing on AB 366.

Every parent has the right and expectation that their children will be safe when they send them to school. Unfortunately, violence in our school systems is intensifying. This is especially true in Milwaukee where calls to the police have become a daily occurrence. In fact, at each of the 11 large high schools, calls to police averaged two per day during the first six months of 2007.

Not only is the level of violence increasing, so too is the severity of this violence. In the first semester of the 2006-2007 school year, more than 127 Milwaukee Public School employees were physically assaulted by students and outsiders coming onto the campuses.

The proliferation of cell phones has created a new and unique problem for school security, students using their personal phones to call in non-student, "reinforcements", from outside of the school to help them in their fights. At Bradley Tech High School in January 2007, female students who got into the fight used their cell phones to summon help from family members. At least 20 family members turned up and it took both school officials and the police to break up the fight. Six students and five adults were ultimately arrested.

Then there was the fight at the Bradley Tech – Bay View basketball game which sent hundreds of fans onto the court, sparking a disturbance that injured four police officers and two students and led to at 10 arrests. Unfortunately, these instances are no longer uncommon.

I feel that one way to combat the growing incidence of violence is to increase the penalties on crimes committed on school property, especially on non-students who are there only to perpetrate violence. AB 366, my "Violence-Free School Zone Act", enhances the penalties on persons committing violent crimes on school premises.

Under this bill, if a person commits a violent crime on school premises, the maximum term of imprisonment is increased by six years for the first offense, ten years for the second offense, and 15 years for the third or subsequent offense. This bill applies to persons who are not students at the school and if the crime is committed during school hours or within one hour of school starting or ending.

Present penalties are not sufficient to dissuade non-students from coming onto school grounds and increasing an already violent situation. I will be happy to answer any questions.